

Message Text

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LIMDIS/NOFORN

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, ET

SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER'S COMMENTS ON INTERNAL POLITICAL SITUATION

1. SUMMARY. DURING A MEETING WITH ME ON AUGUST 15 FONMIN ZEWDE GEBRE-SELASSIE DISCUSSED AT SOME LENGTH INTERNAL POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS SINCE BEGINNING OF MARCH. HE HAS BEEN EXCELLENTLY PLACED TO OBSERVE THESE DEVELOPMENTS AND I BELIEVE HIS ACCOUNT IS AN ACCURATE ONE. A STRIKING ASPECT OF HIS ACCOUNT IS ITS INDICATION OF THE CABINET'S VERY LIMITED KNOWLEDGE REGARDING THE COMPOSITION, INTENTIONS, AND BASIC VIEWS OF THE MILITARY REBELS AND THE ARMED FORCES COORDINATING COMMITTEE (AFCC) ITSELF. ZEWDE BELIEVES, HOWEVER, THAT THIS GROUP OF UNKNOWN AND UNPREDICTABLE REBELS CAN SEIZE COMPLETE CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT AT ANY TIME AND WILL PROBABLY DO SO IF IT CONCLUDES THAT THE COUNTRY AS A WHOLE WOULD TOLERATE THIS.
END SUMMARY.

2. ZEWDE SAID THE NEW POLITICAL ERA IN ETHIOPIA GOT OFF TO A VERY BAD START IN EARLY MARCH BECAUSE PRIME MINISTER ENDALKACHEW MAKONNEN NEVER ENJOYED THE CONFIDENCE OF THE MILITARY REBELS. HE SUBSEQUENTLY MADE MATTERS WORSE BY ASSUMING HE COULD GOVERN WITHOUT CONSULTING THEM. IN THIS HE WAS ENCOURAGED BY GENERAL ABIYE, WHO ASSURED HIM THAT MILITARY WERE UNDER CONTROL. THE WARNINGS OF
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GENERAL WOLDE-SELASSIE BEREKE THAT MILITARY WERE INSISTENT UPON

ARRESTS OF FORMER CABINET OFFICIALS AND OTHER PRESTIGIOUS FIGURES WERE IGNORED. ZEWDE HIMSELF ARGUED THAT IT WAS ESSENTIAL HAVE CONSTANT DIALOGUE WITH THE MILITARY REBELS. HE WAS TOLD THAT CABINET DID NOT KNOW WITH WHOM TO TALK. ENDALKACHEW MET A FEW TIMES WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF DIFFERENT MILITARY UNITS AND WAS MISTAKENLY CONFIDENT ON BASIS THESE MEETINGS THAT MILITARY SUPPORTED HIM.

3. ZEWDE WAS SUBSEQUENTLY APPOINTED CHAIRMAN OF THE FOUR-MAN CABINET COMMITTEE TO DISCUSS IMPORTANT MATTERS WITH MILITARY REBELS. FROM THE OUTSET HE TOOK POSITION THAT THE MILITARY SHOULD CLEARLY DECIDE WHETHER THEY WISHED COMPLETELY TAKE OVER GOVERNMENT, OR WHETHER THEY WERE PREPARED LET ENDALKACHEW CABINET GOVERN IN A RELATIVELY NORMAL FASHION. MILITARY INSISTED THAT THEY DID NOT WANT TO TAKE OVER, NOR WERE THEY WILLING AT THAT TIME TO PUT MILITARY OFFICERS IN A FEW CABINET POSITIONS WHICH WERE OFFERED IN HOPES OF "TAMING THEM. THEY DEMANDED APPOINTMENT GENERAL AMAN AS CHIEF OF STAFF, AN AMNESTY FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS AND, AT ZEWDE'S SUGGESTION, RAPID ENACTMENT OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION. ZEWDE WARNED THEM THAT MISUNDERSTANDINGS COULD EASILY PROVOKE AN ARMED CLASH BETWEEN DIFFERENT MILITARY UNITS WHICH COULD INITIATE CIVIL WAR; IT WAS LARGELY BECAUSE OF THIS WARNING THAT THE DIFFERENT MILITARY UNITS ASSURED EACH OTHER AT THIS TIME OF THEIR LOYALTY TO CROWN AND GOVERNMENT. BY THE TIME ENDALKACHEW WAS READY TO TAKE THE MILITARY REBELS SERIOUSLY, HOWEVER, THEIR PATIENCE HAD RUN OUT AND THE NEW WAVE OF ARRESTS BEGAN IN LATE JUNE.

4. ZEWDE WENT OFF TO KINSHASA AND TEHRAN AND THEN WENT ON TO LONDON BECAUSE OF A MEDICAL PROBLEM. HE THEN RECEIVED ON JULY 20 A TELEGRAM FROM THE MILITARY TO RETURN TO ADDIS IMMEDIATELY, WHICH HE DID. AN AFCC REPRESENTATIVE INFORMED HIM THAT AFCC HAD REACHED THREE DECISIONS: (1) PRIME MINISTER ENDALKACHEW MUST GO; (2) THE PRIME MINISTER AFTER ENACTMENT OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION SHOULD BE EITHER MICHAEL IMRU OR ZEWDE; (3) THE INTERIM PRIME MINISTER SHOULD BE SENATOR HADDIS ALEMAYEHU, WITH MICHAEL AND ZEWDE AS HIS DEPUTIES. HOWEVER, HADDIS SHORTLY THEREAFTER FLATLY REFUSED TO ACCEPT THIS POST. WHEN THE MILITARY THEN ASKED ZEWDE IF HE WOULD BE INTERIM PRIME MINISTER, HE SAID HE WOULD HAVE TO HAVE ASSURANCES REGARDING HIS AUTHORITY AND THAT IN ANY CASE HE THOUGHT IT MADE MORE SENSE FOR ENDALKACHEW TO STAY ON UNTIL NEW CONSTITUTION IN SECRET

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EFFECT. MILITARY SAID THIS WAS IMPOSSIBLE BECAUSE ENDALKACHEW HAD TRIED TO DIVIDE ARMED FORCES AGAINST EACH OTHER. ALTHOUGH MICHAEL IMRU HAD PROMISED TO COME BACK FROM GENEVA TO DISCUSS THE SITUATION, HE HAD NOT YET DONE SO.

5. AFCC WAS NOW FED UP WITH CIVILIANS AND SAID IT WOULD TAKE OVER COMPLETELY ON FOLLOWING DAY (JULY 23, SUSPENDING CONSTITUTION AND RULING BY MILITARY DECREE. RAS IMRU CAME FORWARD AT THIS POINT

AND PROMISED AT 1700 THAT HIS SON WOULD "OBEY ORDERS" AND ACCEPT POSITION AS PRIME MINISTER IF HE WERE APPOINTED BY THE EMPEROR. THE MILITARY ACCEPTED THIS ASSURANCE AND APPOINTMENT WAS MADE BY EMPEROR THAT EVENING. AFTER MICHAEL CAME BACK HE ASKED FOR CERTAIN ASSURANCES AND THEN ACCEPTED THE PRIME MINISTER'S POST. SINCE THEN THERE HAS BEEN A STRUGGLE WITH THE AFCC REGARDING COMPOSITION OF THE CABINET. THEY INITIALLY DEMANDED THE POSTS OF DEFENSE, INTERIOR, AND SECURITY FOR MILITARY MEN AND THEY WANTED VETO POWER ON POSTS OF LAND REFORM, INFORMATION AND EDUCATION. ZEWDE DID NOT DISCUSS DEVELOPMENTS OF LAST FEW DAYS IN THIS RESPECT.

6. ZEWDE SAID THAT GENERAL AMAN HAS MORE INFLUENCE WITH AFCC THAN OTHER CABINET MINISTERS BUT THAT EVEN HIS INFLUENCE IS QUITE LIMITED. ALTHOUGH THE AFCC HAS INSISTED THAT IT FAVORS PROMULGATION OF A NEW CONSTITUTION AND WILL RESPECT ITS PROVISIONS. ZEWDE SERIOUSLY DOUBTS WHETHER THE AFCC WOULD IN FACT RESPECT THE CONSTITUTION WHEN ITS PROVISIONS CONFLICTED WITH THEIR WISHES. HE BELIEVES THAT THE AFCC IS NOW MAKING A CAREFUL SURVEY TO DETERMINE HOW THE COUNTRY AS A WHOLE WOULD REACT IF THERE SHOULD BE A TOTAL MILITARY TAKEOVER. HE THINKS THE AFCC WILL CARRY OUT SUCH A TAKEOVER IF THE SURVEY IS SUFFICIENTLY ENCOURAGING IN THIS RESPECT.

7. ZEWDE INDICATED THAT HE REALLY HAS NO IDEA WHAT THE AFCC'S VIEWS ARE ON FOREIGN POLICY AND WHAT ITS ATTITUDE IS TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES. IN THIS CONNECTION HE ASKED ABOUT THE ATTITUDES WHICH ETHIOPIAN MILITARY RE CURRENTLY DISPLAYING TOWARDS MAAG PERSONNEL. I REPLIED THAT THEY ARE GRATIFYINGLY FRIENDLY AND HELPFUL. ZEWDE SAID THAT THE AFCC DOES HAVE SOME COMMUNIST-TYPE, ANTI-AMERICAN MEMBERS, AND THAT THE VIEWS OF THE AFCC ARE OFTEN NAIVE. THE COORDINATING COMMITTEE WHICH WAS RECENTLY ESTABLISHED TO BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THE CABINET AND THE AFCC WAS ENVISAGED AS A MEANS OF ASCERTAINING THE VIEWS OF THE AFCC ON FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES, INCLUDING FOREIGN POLICY, AND OF EDUCATING ITS MEMBERS

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REGARDING SOME OF THE PRACTICAL DIFFICULTIES FACED BY THE CABINET. THE MILITARY MEMBERS OF THIS COMMITTEE HAVE THUS FAR NOT BEEN WILLING TO SAYMUCH ABOUT THEIR BASIC VIEWS, HOWEVER, AND THE AFCC HAS CONTINUED TO ANNOUNCE IMPORTANT DECISIONS OF ITS OWN WITHOUT CONSULTING THE GOVERNMENT.

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